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Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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THE death of Sir James Linton, P. R. I., at the age of seventy-six, reminds us how few there are still left who may claim to have belonged to the Victorian era, or even to its concluding decades. The Pre-Raphaelites without exception have gone—Holman Hunt, Madox Brown, Rossetti, Dyce, Millais, Burne Jones, Sandys; in addition Leighton, Herkomer, Alma Tadema, Gregory, Abbey, Whistler, Cooper, Hook, and a host of others who contributed to the distinction of their time. When these were amongst us, if one dropped out here, another there, yet we still felt that the stage was held by the same cast, till some exit like that of Sir James, leaving his posts and honors to be filled and assumed by men of a new day, brings home to us the fact that his own generation had be-


come history. There is a touching and impressive service during Holy Week in the Roman Communion known as Tenebrae which not inaptly images this sudden merging of the present in the past. The Church is darkened save for a number of candles on the High Altar arranged somewhat pyramidically according to an ancient traditional ritual. The Psalms and other portions of the Scripture are intoned and sung to Gregorian chants which may have been heard in the Temple of Jerusalem. At certain intervals a candle is extinguished; but absorbed in the devotional and spirit-moving music, the congregation is hardly conscious at first of their gradually lessening number, till the last lights now on the point of extinction, seem presently charged with meaning and a sense of hap-

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OLD MAN AND BOY
By George Clausen, R. A.

penings the while the music in heightened intensity rolls through the arches and columns of the darkened building. The interpretation usually given of this strange ceremonial is that it symbolizes in the gradual extinction of the lights the passing of the Old Jewish dispensation to make way for the New. Sir James Linton will always be identified with Victorian Art not so much by the correspondence in duration of years of his career with it, as by his undoubting and unswerving adherence and devotion to the conceptions of the purpose and object of painting, which ruled the latter half of the 19th Century.

It is true that the first portents of Modernism had appeared in the work of the French Impressionists in France, and of Whistler in England. Thirty years ago Linton discerned the possibilities of evil in the then developments of French painting and uttered a warning to English students; how true and prophetic those warning words were he then



THE WINDOW
By George Clausen, R. A.

could little have realized, who lived to see men and women divesting themselves of the attributes of sane and rational beings, in the name of Art.

Quite distinguished, within his limits, as an artist, he was also a man of affairs. He was the moving spirit in the great re-organization of the Water Color Institute which for years made it a formidable rival of the Old Society, that doyen of the world's aquarellist academies. He first stepped to the front of the stage as the fortunate recipient of a commission to paint a series of pictures depicting noted incidents in English History. This he successfully carried out with great technical skill and much artistic judgment and taste. Apart from these qualities the pictures are interesting in that Sir James made little use of the professional models but impressed into his service his contemporaries in Art, Music, Literature and the Drama. During his long career he confined himself to historic genre with

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THE PIPER
By A. J. Munnings

the exception of a temporary excursion into landscape—best forgotten. His power of rendering surfaces and texture either in oil or in that infinitely more difficult medium water color, was unsurpassable; and he delighted in the most complicated detail, which he rendered with the loving care and skill of a primitive, yet the tone and breadth of his pictures picked them out in any exhibition. I have had occasion before, to refer to the fact that painters and sculptors appear to experience the inroads of age less than most mortals, from Michael Angelo to Harpignies' death the other day at ninety-seven the eye and hand inspiration of the art worker defy the attacks of time. Linton was no exception to the law, he retained his powers to the very end, his small work in this year's academy struck quite a distinct note of accomplishment and technical skill very welcome in this, the day of the fumbler and the amateur.

The war has claimed its first victim from

the "Langham Society" in young Stuart Boyd who lately died of his wounds at Rouen. He was a rising artist of great promise, with a very distinctive outlook. His family possessed some property in the Island of Minorca in the Mediterranean, and he frequently assayed with great courage and no small measure of success, to reproduce in paint the unearthly glory and brilliancy of the autumnal color of that haunt of legend, romance and beauty: again we hear that sadly frequent refrain in the sorrow-laden Saga of this war—he was an only child! Though not a member he was a fairly regular exhibitor at the "New English"—consequently he was modernist in his tendencies, but in no sense extremist.

I made some reference last month to the work of George Clausen. A contemporary of Sir James Linton though considerably younger, he is yet old enough to rank almost as a Victorian by the years of his artistic career:

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for by reputation and honors he had "arrived" long before the Great Queen laid down her sceptre. But whilst Linton never swerved from his first ideal, the ideals of his predecessors, Clausen was from the first one who ventured much and the spirit of "great adventure" is still strong in him. When we think he has at last finally found himself in Art, and we are satisfied and we think he ought to be—on the contrary, like those pioneers who having built themselves a home in the wilderness, presently move on as being crowded in, because a neighbor has come to live some ten miles away, so with Clausen; having attained to and delighted us with a new, and we are content to think final phase, presently we miss it and he has moved on into the wilderness again and is busy building himself a new temple of Art.

The only definite influence, ancient or modern, which I can trace in his work, as I said in my last article, is that of Bastien Lepage and it has been most persistent. Some of his nudes have something perhaps, despite their marked individuality and modernity, of the spirit of the Italian masters, though for his "Youth Mourning" it would be hard to find any exemplar or inspiration outside the artist's own work. In previous references to Clausen's work I have spoken of that austerity which more or less has always characterized it. In choice of subject, in its color schemes, it never can be felt as an expression or revelation of the "*joie de vivre*." All through its varied aspects a vein of asceticism has marked and permeated it, whether he is expounding it as the spirit of Nature or the spirit of Man. In his fine series of pictures of the "Reaper" at his tasks, though bathed maybe in summer sunlight yet the sky behind looms stormy and purple, seldom mellow and genial or prophesying fairer days to come. He gives us the heat and the dazing glare that blurs and sets a-quivering the outlines of tree, hay-stack or barn but never the mellow silvery or golden glow of a Loraine or Wilson or of Turner as in the "Crossing the Brook" for instance. The grey skies, the cold greens and the purplish browns of a bleak winter afternoon, he renders with an intimacy that re-

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veals a love of these trite aspects of nature. Moreover in selection of subject he invariably appears deliberately to eschew the picturesque. The "Old Man and Boy" is a very rare instance to the contrary. It is always the toil and the burden of life which color and underlie his conceptions, when he takes humanity as the subject of his work. Even when as in the picture "The Window," he essays to present aspects of life where its amenities can be cultivated, life is felt to be serious. The reproduction, beautiful as it is, does not do justice to this harmonious symphony in white, the delicate tones of which gain an added significance from the very solid, defined and deliberate technique in which they are rendered; there is nothing of the loose, casual, flowing paint affected by Whistler in his pictures in a similar key. I am pleased to say that it has been acquired by the Art Gallery of Cape Town, South Africa.

In most marked contrast to the spirit of Mr. Clausen's work is that of a much younger man, Mr. A. J. Munnings. For both, it is

mainly the life of the people that supplies the material and story of their work, but while the elder artist feels the sombreness of life, the art of the other vibrates in every touch with the mere joy of existence, accepted as it comes from the lap of fate, without question or heed of the morrow. In its intimate sympathy with the simple pleasures of lowly folk yet virile and as free from sentimentality as the boisterous house-breakers or plough boys whom he depicts, his art in my considered opinion surpasses anything of his predecessors, Sir David Wilkie, George Morland and the great Dutch painters of low life. In the last Academy he exhibited a water-color drawing, "The Piper," which for living human vital quality eclipsed everything else in sight. Its technique, i. e., its drawing and coloring and method out-heroded in daring and irresponsibility post-impressionism at its lowest, but Sargent himself in the result could not be more convincing or true to the reality of things; but this very brilliancy of technique makes monochrome reproductions of



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much of his work very incomplete and in substance inaccurate. Munnings gets form and movement not only by line and mass but by his color relations also, so that monochrome reproduction of his pictures frequently give but the frame-work of his conceptions. Unfortunately it is so much the case in the instance of this marvelous drawing that the reproduction almost belies my words. The drawing represents a Scotch piper in the national costume playing the bagpipes to three men dancing outside an inn in some seaport or fishing village, which is evidently in holiday mood. The figure which supplies the motive is the bald-headed man in the foreground and all of us who are familiar with English life will recognize that he is the village humorist and a local character to boot, and anything more delightfully and lovably quaint than his queer, quizzical apology for the human countenance it would be impossible to conceive, it absolutely radiates the joyous

abandon of these happy, carefree moments, let the morrow bring what it may of toil and trouble; his two vis-a-vis with kind and appreciative glee play up to him for all they are worth and are themselves inimitably true to type, though the camera has barely indicated this, with its false values in their faces. So far the note is only one of village revelry, but in the piper himself, a man of finer mould, a higher note is struck, which again is sounded in the grandeur of the fine sky, which storm-laden broods over the scene, as if at enmity with this short-lived hour of human pleasure. This epic feeling is sensed in the strength and beauty of the two splendid Shire horses whose towering forms seem akin to the great clouds above rather than to the care-worn, toil-bent humanity enjoying its little hour of respite around them. The reproduction, faulty as it is, gives some idea of the masterly ease and simplicity of method by which these types of equine strength and beauty have been

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realized. To those who know Mr. Munnings it is needless to explain, that probably nothing of the meanings with which the drawing is fraught to me and others, were consciously in his thoughts or purpose. His art is as free of any intention to imply meaning or point morals outside the canvas, as anything could well be, the tendency for us to do so arises from the fact that the painter is by nature one with his subjects, and he loves these men and women of the people and their four-footed friends from their hearts outward so that we cannot but feel the inner soul of that outer vision which his instinctive skill renders so unerringly and convincingly. Its masterly ease of drawing, without drawing, its indifference to anything like meticulous carefulness and adherence to correctness in unessentials of line or tint, might at first sight cause us to class his art with that of Augustus John. They are wide apart as the poles. The latter's work is very poor with affectation and the effort after singularity for notoriety's sake

is frequently deliberately bad in drawing in order to excite comment and its consequent advertisement, and foul in color. John's most tolerable things, his studies of more or less rustic figures, are palpably studies from a model and have no more significance than the studies at any life school of which indeed they smell. Munnings' art suggests that he never has entered the doors of a school or used a professional model in his life. For sheer artistry in contemporary art, I would class four men together—Sargent, Brangwyn, Charles John Collings and Munnings.

The next month will be interesting or in some cases amusing to the critic and to the artist who can find time for them, by reason of the various exhibitions open or opening: that at the Leicester Galleries of the reformed Cubist or Futurist Nevinson, the Arts & Crafts Show at the Royal Academy—what an innovation! International—but they must wait.